

Templation



TEMPTATION
AND OTHER DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS



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TEMPTATION

AND OTHER

DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

BY
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“SUCH AS SHE”

“SUCH AS SHE”

GOD at the first did woman make, but not
one—such as She ;
Christ on Calvary crucified died, to save all—
such as She ;
Man for his pleasures bestial has damnéd such
as She ;
Satan all things knew must die, save lust and
—such as She.



TEMPTATION

TEMPTATION

I CARLO FRANCESCO RONDENTO, do hereby swear that this is the true confession of the crime for which on the morrow, as the sun rises, I am to pay the supreme penalty!

What should or do I care? Cielo! Nothing!

Better men than I have suffered even unjustly; greater sinners than I—though I be a murderer—are still among the living. Had I to live my life again, I should and could act in no other way.

I write these few lines, that those who know me (believing that I should not write a falsehood as I stand on the brink of my own grave) may understand the motive that prompted my actions, and that in death I may not lose the good opinion they had of me in life. I write these lines, that those who do not know me—the judges who tried me, and the people to whom I am familiar in name

Temptation only—that even they may pity me and pardon one whose last act, though a crime in the eyes of the world, was the best deed he had ever done.

I am an artist, and my work of “The Crucifixion” was held to be great by wise and clever people: yet the face of the Saviour was painted by a murderer’s hand. Maledetto! ’tis strange!

“Had he lived, he doubtless would have become famous”; so the men who write may say after to-morrow, but He who rules the life of man has willed it otherwise.

The Duchessa di Villamonte is dead, and in the “Land of Waiting” she and I will meet upon the morrow. In the hereafter, when the crimes are read over out of the great judgment book, will she witness against me, or accuse me? I think not! It would be of little or no use when the Judge knows, since no sin can be committed without His knowledge. The silent wound in her breast and the silver Crucifix—my mother’s gift—which I placed upon her lips have sworn my life away. But the reason for the crime will plead for my soul to his Maker and I shall be judged accordingly.

* * * * *

It is now fourteen days since she was murdered—murdered! it seems too hard a word. Read now the story of the events that caused her death, read and judge!

She sent for me, and I went at her bidding to the Palazzo Villamonte. I was ushered in and awaited her coming. I had brought with me my easel, paints and canvas, for I knew, or thought at least, that it was in my capacity of artist that she needed me. Poor fool! One should think less, then one would be sure!

I had not waited long, when the heavy curtains were swept aside and she stood before me. I had never seen her before, and, although her rare beauty was a matter of common report, I was not prepared for such a vision of supreme loveliness as was now offered to my admiring gaze. *Corpo di Cristo!* I had known handsome women, but never anyone like her.

How shall I describe her? A small oval face, crowned with a mass of Titian gold hair in loose coils upon her head, and held in their place by a small stiletto. A skin that made me feel how poor an artist I should appear, should she command me to reproduce it on my canvas. Eyes! Eyes of deep sapphire hue, liquid, wondrous! Eyes whose large, black

Temptation pupils seemed to have the power of changing at will the colouring of the whole orb; eyes that were blue with the blue of the Tuscan sky in some lights, black with the blackness of a stormy night in others. The lashes and eyebrows, too, were dark. Her complexion that of the Madonnas of the great masters, as we see them niched in the cathedral aisles of our cities! A mouth with lips of Cupid's bow, and teeth the whiteness of which made the pearls around her throat appear almost discoloured.

She wore a loose, clinging robe which showed the exquisite moulding of her arms, breasts and supple waist.—I could not take my eyes from her. A woman before whom Cleopatra's beauty must have paled as the cold light of the moon before the lurid, burning rays of the setting sun. A woman created to be loved, to be obeyed, to rule mankind even as God rules the world, without questioning.

She moved towards me and she spoke, and then I fully realized the utter worthlessness of my art. Never could I give life to that mouth and let music drop as it did from her lips!

I noticed that while I had been watching

her she had done much the same by me, and Temptation the result of her scrutiny was evidently not displeasing to her, for she smiled a little as she sat down. I asked what she desired of me, but she only motioned me to be silent; in a few seconds she spoke:

“Yes! they were right. You are very handsome.” I smiled, for women had told me that before. Yes, I suppose I was. Heaven had been kind to me in that respect. Kind, did I say? And for that and through that kindness I am to die to-morrow!—She poured me out some wine and I drank. The room was hot and the smell of incense seemed to me oppressive. Presently she spoke again: “You are a great artist. I want you to paint me.” Again she paused and looked at me. “I have seen all your works,” she continued, “and your nudes seem to me the most perfect of all. Are you as great a lover as you are an artist? Well, well! I want you to paint me.” And as she spoke she took the stiletto out of her hair, unfastened her robe, and both fell to the ground.

“Come, paint me!” she said, “begin!”

But I only stood and gazed. Cielo! if I had thought her lovely before, what did I think her then? I had painted from the nude

Temptation all my life, and it was only the artist in me that made me gaze at her—at first!! But she came nearer to me, clothed only in her beauty, till I almost felt her warm, scented breath upon my cheek. Then I shielded her image from my eyes, for I felt dazed—dazed by the beauty of face and form, the dazzling whiteness of her skin, the glorious warmth and sheen in the ripples of her hair. But she came and gently drew my hands away, and I could not help but look. Again she smiled and said: “Come! come!! You are an artist—paint me!” But I drew back, for then I realized what she had meant when she said: “They were right. You are handsome.” I had only been in the village a few days, but long enough to know that she was married—married to a man who in years might have been her father, one who had bought her with his title and gold, as such women are to be purchased. Strangers had disappeared from time to time, no one knew whither; but the old folk would shake their heads at the Palazzo and cross themselves as they passed by, and scandal played about her name and her home. All this and more flashed across my mind as I gazed into her face, and I trembled. Not because I was afraid of *her*—

but of *myself*. I was young, and the hot blood Temptation of youth flowed through my veins; she—she was not free to be loved, and I would not sin—therefore I trembled.

“Come, paint!” And she laid her hands upon my shoulders, and her golden hair brushed against my cheeks, and her white breasts were close to me. “Come, paint!!” And a fierce fight took place within me, a fight ’twixt honour and sin—and honour conquered; and I drew myself away and I took her hands from where they were and I put her from me, saying: “The pictures I paint . . . I paint for the world . . . for fame . . . I could not show yours . . . there are those who would know and recognize—and recognizing would understand.”

“I will buy it,” she said. “I will give you more than the world has ever paid you—more than it ever will.”

And I smiled. “Yes! the extra gold is to buy my honour—my soul! I barter neither to women!”—but then *she* smiled. . . .

“You are handsomer now than ever. Passion suits you—and scorn. Come, paint!!” “No,” I cried, for I was not sure of myself—“I am going; I am not to be bought!” And I turned to take my easel, when a laugh broke

Temptation upon my ear—a cold, hard, inhuman laugh that froze the blood within my veins.

“Going?” she cried. “Fool! you do not know me!!”

I stood as one in a dream. Could this be the same woman that now stood before me, with glittering eyes, every particle of colour gone from her cheeks, her white teeth pressed so hard into her lips that here and there a drop of blood stained the ivory surface of her skin around her mouth and fell to her breasts below? Bloodstains there over her heart! Should she not have been warned?

Could this be the same woman that stood before me, quietly fastening her robe across her bosom and coiling her hair upon her head, slowly, deliberately, keeping it in its place with the stiletto, whilst her eyes seemed to burn into my very soul, seaming and scarring it, and burning it into ashes? Could this be the same woman I had likened to the Madonna only a few seconds ago? Could it? I almost doubted my senses.

“Going!” she cried again. “Have you heard nothing then out yonder that makes you think that, perhaps, you will never go?”

In a moment I gathered what she meant. I



knew now why the old folk crossed them- Temptation
selves, and I paused. . . .

“Come, think again!” But I was resolved. I went to her and took her two wrists firmly in my hands, and looked into her face as no man had ever looked, and then I exclaimed: “Corpo di Cristo! You are the loveliest woman I have ever beheld—the most beautiful handiwork of God! But to me you are more loathsome than the leprous beggar at your gates, lower than all the wantons in your streets—for vice is their *métier*! Had I succumbed when you stood before me, as you did just now, Heaven could scarcely have blamed me, since God made you—and I am young and mortal. . . . Let me go!”

She only laughed: “Since it would have been no blame to you, why not have succumbed and lived?”

“Lived? I *shall* live!”

She wrenched her wrists from me. “You think so? Poor fool! You think I shall allow you to go out yonder to boast that my beauty had no power over you?—that I offered you sin and that you would not share? Had you—you would have lived—lived and loved, and gone. The fear of my husband’s revenge would have tied your tongue—but now. . . .”

Temptation “ What? ” I cried. “ I am not a coward. Your threats do not alarm me. ”

“ They are no idle threats. Others have known that, but they *were* cowards—you are not! You have reasoned well and I like you. ”

“ Let me go then! ”

“ No! think again! ”

Did she fancy I was relenting?—I know not, but she took the stiletto from her hair and placed it on the table, and the coils fell over her shoulders like a shower of gold.

“ What, ” I cried, “ if I still refuse? ”

“ Then you die, like the others, starved, and your body thrown into the Tiber, where all secrets are buried safely. ”

“ And if I consent? ”

She came towards me; she put her white arms around me. “ You shall live. ” . . . She buried her face against my heart; she took my hand and kissed it, as her robe slipped from her shoulders to the ground.

Over her head I saw the stiletto that had fastened her hair, lying upon the table. I stretched out my hand—slowly, carefully, until I grasped it; then, holding her close to me, pressed my burning lips to hers and gazed into her eyes, till they closed 'neath the passionate look in mine. Then—then, with a swift

movement—there—there!—where the blood Temptation from her lips had fallen upon her bosom, I buried the stiletto in her heart—and this lovely, sinning temptress, adulteress, murderess, clothed only in her shame, lay dead at my feet.

I put her robe around her, placed upon her lips the little silver crucifix that my mother had given me, and then went out into the night.

I might have fled, had I so chosen; but I gave myself up—and to-morrow, as the sun rises, I die. . . .

Signed

Carlo Francesco Rondento.

FLEUR DE LA CROIX

FLEUR DE LA CROIX

THAT? Oh, that is "Fleur de la Croix."
You have never seen it? But then you said before you have never been in our flower country.

Bright crimson—is it not? Petals shaped like a cross, you see. Have you ever heard the legend attached to it?

No.

I'll tell you then. It was never found till the morning that followed Calvary's great night; then a cluster of it was seen growing where the drops of His blood had fallen. That accounts for the colour and name: "Fleur de la Croix." I have never been to your country, England. You have, of course, flowers of your own, though we, I believe, send you great quantities of blossoms. It has always seemed so cruel to me: picked here in God's air and sunshine, then packed in their wooden

Fleur de la
Croix

coffins, to be taken out at their journey's end, to be revived and brought back to life, only to be killed again by the gas and the heat, pierced through the heart with a silver wire, to keep them from breaking—stifled in your dust and glare. Still we do much the same by each other, we mortals—I was going to say “Christians,” but that the commencement of this word sounds too gentle for so rough a usage. A man kills his love and then attempts his own life; the law finds him half dead, with his lips pressed to hers, and instantly drags him roughly away, nurses him back to life at great pain and expense; then, having done so good—so good?—a deed, they put him on his trial, find him guilty of murder and hang him—and that they call justice!

God said “a life for a life.” Well! that poor lover meant to give his for hers, had thought that he and she would wander hand in hand in the “Land of Waiting,” and still together take their trial when the end should come. Surely justice should be tempered with mercy. Where was the mercy in not letting that poor creature die? Ah!—but to return.

The faith here is that those in whose gardens the “Fleur de la Croix” will grow are blessed

by God. I used to live in Lorraine, before the great war stole from us that province with its sister. It was one of those quiet, peaceful little villages, nestled amongst the trees that are chained together with the fragrant mimosa blossom and honeysuckle. We were completely hemmed in by foliage. It was a world of our own, and the news of your great vast cities seldom forced its way into the happy ignorance and contentedness of our little homes. Scandal and the ways of Courts we knew nothing of, and cared less. All were happy, like one large united family, and I—well, I was the king of happiness, for I was loved even where I loved.

The following spring was to have seen our union,—she and I. *L'homme propose et Dieu dispose.*

One day the news reached us, that war had been declared against our France, and we, the young men, were to put on uniform and go to Paris to defend our country. Oh, what an avalanche, this news! how it seemed to paralyze the whole community. How it dethroned me from my kingdom of happiness. War! How could we tell how it would end? Should we ever return? Ever see those we loved again? This and much more we thought in those few hours that were left to us in our

Fleur de la
Croix

homes; and on the morrow we left—left with the bands playing, with waving hats and smiling lips that bravely, but oh! how plainly, tried to conceal the breaking hearts; with tears held back and throbbing breasts we marched to the war.

The last who bade me farewell were my mother and she I loved. They stood at the corner of the lane and waved their kerchiefs, till the trees hid us from their sight which was none too clear, since they were blinded by the mist of tears.

Strange!—strange thought that flashed through my brain: that on my return, if ever I did return, neither would be there to welcome me. I felt that what had been would never be again. . . .

Well! the war was over at last. With what results—you know. I returned to find my mother dead!—my love—married!!

We had suffered much in the campaign, and I had grown almost invulnerable to pain. I had not flinched when they were extracting the bullet from my breast, but now I felt how glad I should have been, had the surgeon taken my heart out with it. My mother dead, and she—I saw her that day: she looked as though she wished to speak, but my heart

was too full. I passed on the other side, with Fleur de la
an aching void in my breast, that I knew Croix
nothing could fill; a dull, heavy pain in the
region of my heart, that I felt would never
leave it—since she was false.

That night I left for a little village where, during our march, I had seen a home for men, left to their memories and their religion, secure from the outside world. I remembered, on the tramp we had rested there, and some of the brothers had given us food and wine, though they drank it not themselves. And I had thought it over austere and presumptuous that they should deny themselves even more than did their Master—a silent rebuke to One Who surely deserved none. I had thought also, as I looked at them, that each and all had passed through some great sorrow; for they did not look happy. Their religion did not satisfy them, and I smiled to think how small false women could make men.

Well, for twelve long months I lived their life—lived, did I say? No, not that! They do not live! Unless waiting and praying for death, for release from a life beset with painful memories, can be called living.

The village was much frequented by invalids, people, anxious to live, whom God had placed

Fleur de la
Croix

near death. There was no church, so that on Sundays they used our chapel; and when any of those who had come to cheat the mighty King failed, it was our hands that laid them to their rest.

How gladly would I then have welcomed my release—for I could not forget.

We took in turn the painful ceremony of placing dust upon dust; and one day, as I saw the funeral cortège wending up the hill that led to our Monastery and beyond to God's Acre, my thoughts had gone back to her and home, to love and life, away from despair and death: to summer and sunshine, from sorrow and shadow. It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to go and perform the last sad rites—but still it had to be done.

My voice trembled as I spake the lines. For a moment my eyes rested on the form of the woman who was the chief mourner: a widow. A mere girl: so she seemed. And I was burying her husband. My thoughts commenced to compare her grief with mine, until I looked again. She did not seem in great sorrow. At least, I fancied not—that is, if tears be signs of pain.

I had not seen her face as yet, but as the last words fell from my lips she raised her

head and—there—there, separated by the yard of grave, the earthy home alike of kings and beggars, she and I looked straight into each other's eyes and recognized each other. Fleur de la Croix

For it was she! she, my love—free! Free to love!—free to marry!! Free to give herself to all—to any—save to me!

As my cowl fell back from my face my heart stood still. Oh, the mockery of it all! When I was free, she was married; now that she was unfettered, I lay bound hand and foot, wedded to a life that, under the stress of my newly acquired knowledge, could not but tear my heart and soul in twain. Oh, to speak to her! To ask what had parted us! What had prompted her to ruin my life! For as I looked I knew his love had never come between us. What had then? Vain questionings! Vain regrets! My hands fell to my side, brushing against my leathern girdle, my ropen beaded rosary and my cross, and I turned away.

That night, as I paced my cell, I thought and thought; prayed, ay, prayed, as I had never prayed before—prayed for strength to live the life I had chosen; but even as I did, these words kept ringing in my ears:

“Why art thou here? Thy garb should be

Fleur de la
Croix

the emblem of thy life, thy self. And is it? Are not your thoughts still carnal? Is not thy heart still with that woman? Be honest! Throw off thy cloak of religion—thy God's livery. Go out into the world, for thou art still of it; go and live thy life. Thy regret and grief have shown thy choice 'twixt God and her, the woman. Go forth! go forth!!”

I cried: “I should have been patient; I should have striven to forget, and, with Thy help, should have succeeded; but Thou! Thou hast torn open the wound within my breast. It is Thou who hast brought this woman to me again. If I had never seen her again, I could have lived here always, always; awaiting Thy mercy to take me home—but now! Forgive me, I must go forth and live—yes, live! for I am only mortal. Ah, I pray Thee, be merciful and blame me not! since Thou hast made her beautiful and hast shown her, nay, brought her, to me.”

On the morrow I saw her and all was explained away. She had married to save the life that had given breath to her.

That night I left my cell. Some months afterwards I came to her and we were united.

* * * * *

Ah! Annette! Bring me a flask of wine. Fleur de la
Monsieur will drink. That is my wife, and Croix
that is "Fleur de la Croix" she has at her
bosom.

It grows in our garden.

* * * * *



THE CYNIC

THE CYNIC

STAND back! Make way, you people of Society, and let the Cynic pass! Don't laugh at him! Don't be afraid of him, but don't throw stones at him. Let him go his way in peace; if peace there be for him. Smile and say some ill-natured thing about him as he passes, only—don't let him hear you!

That's right! Bravo! You with the large, innocent, blue eyes and soft, falling mass of flaxen hair, slander him, malign him—but you cannot deceive me; I know what prompts those ill-natured, unclean things.

You can smile—oh yes, why not? Life is pleasant to you. What if you did marry a poor man who now is even poorer! those diamonds glisten just the same around your pretty, well-moulded neck and heaving bosom. What if he had no right, he who gave them to you, since his was not the hand that placed the

The golden band upon your third finger—do they
Cynic glisten less brightly?—No! And are not his
the lips that meet yours now? Is not his the
breath that fans your cheeks, his the carriage
that waits? Society still receives you, men
still court you, women are still jealous of you:
yet you must say something against the Cynic.
Why? Are you not contented? Is it humiliat-
ing to know that this Cynic was, and still is,
your husband's friend but will not know you
since you left him? Is it? Perhaps it is.
Ah, what a strange world; and how full of
inconsistencies! And how few of us under-
stand human nature! What's that? She who
has listened to you—you, this pretty blonde
frailty—hates him too? Dear me! dear me!
what a hateful world it is, to be sure! How
unlike to what we intend. Ah! now she
turns her face—I know the reason why. So!
so!! my lady, this Cynic was a modern St.
Anthony. Last year you tempted him in
vain, and the words he used then you will
never forget. No one else had dared to say
such things to you—no one else would have
been strong enough to have gone away that
night—no one but the Cynic. Oh, how you
hated him; how you could have killed him
whilst your dark eyes flashed, as you saw

this man with the clear-cut face, the thin lips, the hard mouth which is so strangely contradicted by the expression in the eyes—when you saw him turn on his heel and leave you. The
Cynic

You were married and the Cynic was a man in power; could, if he so pleased, obtain for your husband a remunerative post abroad, that of an attaché to one of the Embassies, which would keep him away from you for so many months in the year. That was what you wanted, since two had loved and one had tired: but you had let your love stray elsewhere, not to the Cynic, mind you—oh no! but to the young Guardsman with the dainty moustache, who is elbowing his way through the crowd to-night to get to your side. He is the latest moth to singe his wings, and Society smiles as he passes. You had pleaded that your husband was pressed for money, that the post would just pull him through; and the Cynic had smiled that curious smile of his which men hate and women fear. How you tried to get him into your power that night! How you tried to dazzle him with the brilliancy of your beauty, the sparkle of your wit, the gorgeous moulding of your figure, the whiteness of your arms, your neck, your shoulders!—And yet he left—left, and within a few hours

The Cynic obtained for your husband a *more remunerative post at home!* How that boy's mother thanked him when she heard—and how you hated—hated, as, when he had left, you gazed into the mirror that night—gazed at the supple beauty of your form, at the brilliancy of your eyes, the warm perfect carving of your lips—yes! how you gazed and wondered, womanlike! How your husband, returning from the House, found you thus and told you, overjoyed, of the office which the Cynic, not ten minutes before, had offered him!

Is there anything too bad, too harsh, that you can say against him now?—you who once offered him your love! And how that boy hates him too, as now the Cynic, passing with your husband, sees you and bows, and linking his arm into that of the young Guardsman, leaves you two together.

The dark man, faultlessly dressed, with the heavy moustache and sallow complexion, who has been standing near your side, smothers an oath between his teeth, turns on his heel, and saunters off in the opposite direction: another hater! It is hard—when one has been a great card-player for years (for *ecarté* is a good game with a sleeved king—at least for one). But the Cynic one night, after watching the

game, had dropped a hint in one of those beautifully cloaked phrases of which he is such a past master, and it had struck home, and you had been asked to resign from the club. The matter was hushed up, for you are a first cousin to a prince of the blood, and the papers for once were cheated out of a startling placard and a deal of washing of soiled linen.

The
Cynic

It is only against you and such as you that this man's cynicism is directed; there are women here to-night at the Embassy, and men too, who have never felt the sting of his words or seen unkindness in one solitary action. These are the ones who sympathize with him, whose lives are honest, whose hearts are true, whose honour is unsullied. They are sorry for him; though they know nothing of his past, they are wise enough to know that it must have been a powerful motive that could have changed this man's life. Others there are that were with him at school and college—when he was the best bat, the finest oar and shot; frank, open, honest, with a kindly word for everyone, trusting and trusted. He suddenly disappeared, and in a few years returned—the Cynic you now behold. They are sorry, the women possibly more than the men, thinking perhaps that one of

The Cynic their own sex may have wrought this mighty change, thrown this heart away that surely was so worth the keeping, wrecked this life that started so brightly, trod underfoot this blossom purer than many there;—and the men, thinking that they in their turn may be the sport of some woman's whim, since they are only puppets in the hands of Providence.

Men are not born cynics. Let him pass then, make way for him. Pity him a little—though your pity can alter nothing. What is his life worth? He sees no flower that has not canker at its heart. There are no four seasons to him: it is winter always. The cold causes the old wounds to throb again. Well! his wound is in his heart; there is no warmth there. Fair women he sees—but she, too, was fair. Honest men—yet he thought his friend honest! Where is she? Where is he? God knows! And what is he who trusted and loved both? Hush! Stand back! Make room, you people of Society, and let the Cynic pass!



WHAT KNOW YOU?

WHAT KNOW YOU?

WHAT know you? You, who have spent
your lives in the livery of your God,
That you should blame my deed of vengeance
and bid me atone!

You, who ne'er bit the radiant splendour of a
woman's hair

Or felt her fresh warm form press lovingly
against your own!

* * * * *

What know you? You, who never from her
eyes made passion shine

Or knew the sweet flesh quiver as hers in that
embrace of mine!

Was it Religion made you Godlike saints you
seem to be,

Or have you felt and known the frailty cursed
of such as she?

Did no Magdalen come to cross your path in
days now dead

What know you? And make you, coward-like, in monkish cowl
 encase your head?
Then what know you of yet my sin, my shame,
 my crime, my love?
I'm the odour of the charnel-house—you—as
 your God above!
I've lived, I've loved. She lived, and loved, and
 more—deceived and died,
By my hand foully murdered.—Why? To save
 my soul—she lied!
My life in hers I crushed. What in God's
 patience should I do?
Let the wanton live and love disgrace? Go!
 go! for what know you?

CORINNE

CORINNE

“BY Jove! it’s a fine head!”

“Yes, few finer.”

“Musical?”

“No. A painter. Dead, poor chap.”

These remarks were exchanged in d’Es-
terre’s studio in the Avenue d’Eylau, Paris. It
was one of those fearfully oppressive days in
late August, when indoors is the only safe
refuge from the scorching rays of a midsummer
sun. Philip Audley reclined in his chair, the
photograph still in his hand, a big cigar be-
tween his teeth, a bottle of hock and a syphon
of potash by his side. He was one of those lazy
devil-may-care Bohemians whose life had
been passed from his earliest years in that
atmosphere of romance breathed only among
the artistic set of all nationalities.

“Yes—a devilish fine head!” Having de-

Corinne livered himself of this last remark, he flung the portrait carelessly on the table.

“That man ought to have been great,” he continued.

“He was. Surely you must know who it is?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Louis Lascelles.”

“Is that Lascelles? Throw me over that photo again, will you? You knew him very well, didn’t you?”

“As well as anyone, I think; I should say, perhaps better, though he was always rather a mystery. He made few friends, but, on the other hand, fewer enemies. No one could say a word against him, and when the end came I think all Paris felt sorry.”

“There was a woman in the case, wasn’t there?”

“How old are you, Audley?”

“What on earth has that to do with it?”

“Was there a woman in the case? Has there ever been a tragedy or comedy in which there was not? Was there a woman!” D’Esterre got up from his chair and, taking a key from his pocket, unlocked a cabinet that stood on a little table in the corner of the studio, and took a miniature from a small, secret drawer.

He passed it almost tenderly to Audley, then Corinne sat down again, muttering to himself: "Was there a woman?"

If Audley had thought the first portrait a subject of interest, how can one describe the impression produced upon him by the second? He actually got up from his comfortable lounging position, and strolled to the window to get a better light on it. This action on the part of a man notorious for his listless laziness was in itself a subject for comment. It did not pass unnoticed by d'Esterre, who burst out laughing.

"Laugh away, old chap," said Audley, still examining the picture.

But the laugh had passed away from d'Esterre's lips almost as quickly as it had come. "It is no use, Audley," he cried; "she is dead too."

"Dead! A beautiful woman like this dead!! And if I met one ugly one coming here this morning, I met a thousand. Ah! how supremely selfish of Heaven! What a lovely creature!"

"Yes, she was."

"Did you know her?"

"Oh yes—very well."

"What a lucky chap you've been."

Corinne “Lucky!! Good God, if you only knew!”

There was something in the tone of d’Esterre’s last remark, a depth of infinite pain, that took Audley to his side in a moment.

“What’s the matter, old fellow?”

“Nothing! Nothing! I thought I was stronger, that’s all. I promised you some time ago that I would tell you certain events of interest in the lives of some of the many dead artists I have known. It’s too hot to go out this morning; if you like, I’ll let you have Lascelles’ story now. I select that one first because you seem interested in the two pictures you have just seen, and partly, perhaps, because it is my life as well as his.”

Audley threw away the end of his cigar, lit a fresh one, helped himself to a long drink, and, making himself perfectly comfortable, flung his feet upon the sofa, and, lying back, puffed the blue clouds up to the painted ceiling.

“Lascelles and myself were village play-mates in the old home in Switzerland—fellow-students, fellow-artists. We both left the same year, he for Paris, I for Rome. Whilst there, I encountered the first, the only and last romance of my life. The Eve of my fool’s paradise was a model who used to sit to me. I thought she liked me—I knew I worshipped

her. Fool to think so much. The world might never have been saved, Calvary's tragedy never taken place, if Heaven had only *thought* that Iscariot would betray, but God knew. Corinne

“After I had known her for some months I received a letter from Lascelles: he was coming to join me. The day he arrived marked the end of my span of dreams. To put it in vulgar phraseology, he cut me out. Not wittingly—it was fair enough: she refused me, and in a few weeks accepted him.

“I left Rome and went to Naples, and after a year or so drifted to Paris and looked Lascelles up. She was with him, but she wore no gold band upon the finger of her left hand. Was that why she had thrown me over? Had I been too honest? Did she think that the responsibilities of marriage would weigh too heavily upon her? As it turned out, I suppose she would have been right, had she thought so. I think she did; she must have. I saw them frequently; and though he seemed as fond of her as ever, I thought she looked discontented. They were very poor at the time. He was not successful. One day I met him and saw at a glance that something had happened. He said: ‘I was coming to you;

Corinne if you ever thought I treated you badly two years ago, you are amply avenged: as she left you for me, so for another has she left me to-day.' It was then I asked him whether she was his wife. I had wronged him: she was. I asked why there was no wedding-ring? A cold, hard laugh broke from his lips.

“ ‘She told me it was a mistake for an artist to be married. The ladies of the great world would not come to me if they knew I had a wife. No, she and I knew; there was no need that the others should, and she could and would wear the ring on a ribbon round her neck till she died: it should always be next her heart. She would know and feel then that she did not stand in my way.’ As he spoke he drew the ring out of his pocket, looked at it and placed it back again. ‘Well, she is not in my way; for she has left.’

“He felt it very much at first. I think this, perhaps, was the additional bond of sympathy that drew us even closer together. We returned to Switzerland for three years. During that time both he and I made rapid strides in our art: we started, as it were, almost a new school; our names soon became known, and on returning to Paris our pictures were exhibited and sold at large prices; in short,

fortune was ours. From the day she had left him her name was as a sealed book between us. It was that same year that a large prize was offered for the best work in an exhibition of the nude at the Salon. We both contributed. I had no doubt Lascelles would win. I knew no artist in Paris who could touch his flesh tints, for either their purity, softness or depth. Still I was afraid of one thing. His subjects were too pure, too chaste in thought, too delicate in their imaginative conception. They were magnificent from an artist's point of view, but they did not appeal to the passions, and I knew Paris well. He failed: a work with little or no artistic merit carried off the prize, for the reasons I have stated. He felt his disappointment keenly, since he was fully aware of the injustice of the award.

“At that time all Paris was talking about a woman who had ruined half its nobility and wealth; her name was on every tongue; her equipage was the smartest, her villa the most richly furnished, her horses the best bred, her diamonds the most brilliant, her beauty unequalled, her vice the most depraved. Nana's splendid triumphs seemed to fade and pale before the reckless splendour of this creature's conquests. Like Nana, she was

Corinne pleased to be known by one word only: '*Corinne.*'

“Although Lascelles and myself had constantly heard the name, as well as the detailed description of her many acts of daring and victorious wantonness, we had never seen her. The night after the announcement of the competition result, talking about his failure, Lascelles suddenly rose from the table, and, bringing his fist down with such force as to make the dinner glasses ring, he cried: ‘By Heaven, I’ll do it. What is this woman all Paris is raving about? Where does she live? My figures are too chaste, the expression on the faces too pure! Well, they shall have “Corinne.”’

“I thought he was mad—but said nothing. I knew how greatly he valued delicacy and purity in art, and dreaded, if he should really contemplate carrying out his idea, what result his triumph would have upon him, for I knew he would succeed. It was only one with as refined a nature as his, who would be able to give full significance to such a work. He would know so well what to avoid in this painting of Corinne.

“That night we went to the opera. In the middle of the first act a general murmur ran

round the house. 'Corinne! C'est Corinne!!' Corinne
We instantly gazed where all others were
gazing. We both saw, we both recognized.
Neither of us spoke. Corinne was his
wife!!

"Once only during the performance he said :
'Did you ever know she was as beautiful as
that? Purity of expression didn't suit her.
She was like my paintings—a failure. She has
succeeded though, and so will I.' When it
was over we stood in the *Foyer* to see her come
out. As she passed us her eyes fell upon
Lascelles' face. I thought her lips quivered.
She knew him, I was sure; but he—well, he
looked, then, turning to me, said loud enough
for her to hear: 'Is that Corinne? Why, she
is not to be compared in face or form to that
little grisette of mine.'

"She heard him and concluded that he did
not know her: that was what he had wished.
Two days later over the breakfast table he
threw me a little, pink, scented note, with crest
in corner:

"'Corinne will be pleased to see M. Las-
celles at twelve to-day.'

"'Are you going?' I asked.

"'Of course,' he replied.

"'Even should she not have recognized you

Corinne the other evening, she must now, since she knows your name.'

"'I do not mind her knowing; but I shall not know her. The Salon shall exhibit "Corinne." Paris shall rave; there shall be no purity, no chastity: they shall have what they want—uncleanness.'

"Well, he kept his word. He saw her; he painted her; he never let her know that he recognized her. The Salon was opened. His picture, 'Corinne,' was exhibited. Paris raved and rushed like a flock of vultures to gloat over the carrion. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, wise men and fools—all congregated in front of it, all attracted by the daring colouring, the perfection of her form, the wondrous, passionate look in her eyes, the glory of the whiteness of her skin, the redness and sensual fulness of her lips, the supple roundness and splendour of her limbs.

"It was the one topic in the playhouse, palace, bagno, club, boudoir and gutter. Men who knew Corinne came to gaze in admiration at this marvellous, masterly, counterfeit presentment of their plaything. Men who knew her not revelled in the suggestive unchastity of the canvas. The triumph for the painter was unprecedented, but what I feared happened.



“His triumph was to him tarnished, his fame
sullied, the gold ill-gotten, the success polluted,
the greatness vileness ; his name in the corner
of the picture was, so he felt, and must always
remain, an everlasting disgrace. Yet the
picture had a fascination even for him, for day
after day he would visit the Salon. Corinne

“One morning he showed me a note from
Corinne, in which she told him that the
picture had made her even more successful
than hitherto. She did not know how to thank
him sufficiently, but would like him to come
and see her. She would so like to have a
replica of the picture to hang in her own
rooms.

“That day as he stood at the Salon with her
note in his hand, Society elbowing and jostling
with the dregs of the demi-monde, he listened
to the comments on his work. I think
Corinne’s note had raised the devil in him.
Close by his side stood a lady of rank and
fashion, with her daughter, a girl of sixteen or
seventeen summers, and with her—well—her
husband’s friend presumably—the usual ‘mari-
age à trois.’ The man made some remark to
the woman, who struck him a playful blow
with her bunch of Parma violets and smiled ;
but the child heard it too, and, with her eyes

Corinne cast down and with the blush of shame upon her face, drew away. Lascelles saw this, and with an oath under his breath he forced his way to the canvas, and, taking out his knife, slit it from top to toe; then, turning, he cried: 'For years I have given you innocence and chastity: in a mad moment I degraded myself and fed you with shame and uncleanness; but, by Heaven! if my doves do not satisfy you, I'll not feed you with carrion!' Then, quickly turning on his heel, he left the building.

"The report of what had taken place ran like wildfire, as you may imagine, round Paris. In the afternoon Corinne drove up. She was white with rage; she went up to his studio. I could hear her plainly from where I sat.

"'You have publicly disgraced me, insulted me, made me ridiculous!' She walked furiously about like a madwoman. 'What have I ever done to you that you should treat me thus?'

"I think for the moment she must have forgotten to whom she spoke. She saw in him only the man who had dared to insult her—not her husband. At that moment I was called away. When I returned a few hours later, I inquired if she had left. 'No,' was the reply. I went up to the studio, but could hear no sound of voices. Finding the door locked, I knocked,

but received no answer. I grew alarmed and, sending for the servant, burst open the door. In a second we realized what had taken place, as we fell back nearly choked by the fumes of the charcoal. When the room had cleared sufficiently to allow our entering, we stepped in. Shall I ever forget the sight that met my view?

Corinne

“Corinne lay upon the sofa, covered only partially by a dark velvet drapery which seemed to intensify the whiteness of her skin. The charcoal stove had burnt itself out; only a few dull red pieces lay in the grate. The silks, satins and laced *jupe piquée*, silent witnesses of the life she had led, lay carelessly thrown upon a chair. On the canvas upon the easel was just the sketched outline of the replica of the Salon picture. Lascelles was kneeling by her side, his face covered by his hands, whilst her left arm hung listlessly around his neck. On the third finger of her hand, in death, was the plain gold band which she had never worn in life.”

“Both dead?”

“Both dead!”

D’Esterre rose listlessly from his chair, and, taking up the miniature and turning his back to Audley, pressed it to his lips. A shudder

Corinne passed through his frame. Then he placed it tenderly in his desk and, whilst he turned the key, exclaimed: "You said just now I had been lucky! I have—I have—God knows!—God knows!!"

WILLIAM STANDALE,
BANK MANAGER

WILLIAM STANDALE, BANK MANAGER

JAMES STANDALE was dining in his rooms in Jermyn Street, Picadilly, on the evening of the 15th of June, 1889, when his attention was suddenly drawn to the shouting of the newspaper boys passing in the streets below.

Extra special!! Mysterious disappearance of a bank manager! Strange revelations!! Extra special!!

He listened for a few seconds, then rang the bell, told his servant to fetch him a paper, sat silently waiting for it, helped himself to a liqueur, and sipped his coffee. The servant returned with the latest edition, removed the things from the table, and left.

Standale lighted his cigar, and sat back in his easy chair with the paper unopened on his knee. Then suddenly he rose and locked the

William Standale, Bank Manager door, opened the paper and read; but he had not proceeded far before he crushed it in his hands with an oath. He rose and paced up and down the room for a few minutes.

“It’s come at last, has it! This accounts for the ‘Daily Telegraph’ sent me this morning in an unknown writing with certain letters marked. Damn him!”

He picked the paper up again and re-read the passage which had drawn the oath from his lips:

“William Standale, manager of the Joint Union Bank, Lombard Street, has absconded, taking with him the sum of £10,000 in gold. At present——”

Here he dropped the paper, went to his desk, unlocked it, and, taking out the copy of the “Daily Telegraph” sent him in the morning, he sat down at his writing-table.

Taking a pen he copied the letters marked on to a sheet of paper in the order in which they came:

ALILENWTNGTETEOORWTALW
LLNRYTNESAP.S.WR.H.NTOSOE
ALEILHAORMTMEMHIONOKBLWL

Then two words were marked in full: the first word of the first column and the last

word of the last column; then the following figures: 3.4.2.5.2.5.4.2.8.2.9.4.7.3.5. William Standale, Bank Manager

He sat for some seconds contemplating the enigma. Then a smile broke over his face.

“First word and last,” he murmured.

“First letter and last. But what do the figures mean? The number of letters in the words? I’ll try.” He took up his pen and started:

3	4	2	5	2	5
ALL	WILL	BE	KNOWN	TO	NIGHT
4	2	8	2	9	
MEET	ME	TOMORROW	AT	HALLIWELL	
4	7	3	5		
LANE	ROYSTON	TEN	SHARP		

Having succeeded in deciphering the message, he again took up the evening paper and finished the article.

“Ah! not yet discovered his whereabouts! no, and you won’t, my friends; he is clever enough to evade all your vigilance and to get the best of Scotland Yard. You are not treating with a common criminal, but with a clever, far-seeing man of the world.”

Whilst muttering this to himself he cut with a pair of scissors the marked passages out of the paper and burned them over his lamp; then

William Standale,
Bank
Manager

he folded the rest of the page into spills and placed them with some others in a vase on his mantelpiece. Then lighting a fresh cigar, he stood for a few minutes in deep thought.

“Well! they always say there is one black sheep in every family. Hang it all! that is poor consolation. The worst part is that the wrong 'uns invariably have more than their fair share of the family brains. Why the devil they never bowled him out before, I don't know. £10,000! he meant it this time.”

So he mused to himself; then, strolling over to his bookshelf, he took down an A. B. C. guide. Royston from Paddington, fifty-seven miles, population 300. Leave Paddington 7.49, arrive Royston 9.33. Leave Royston 11.37, arrive Paddington 12.59.

“That will do,” he said, and replaced the A. B. C. Then putting on his hat he went out. Going to his left on leaving, he walked up St. James's Street, and on reaching Piccadilly wended his way towards the park. On leaving his rooms he thought he had noticed a man opposite his front door watching the house. However, after having taken a mental note of the fellow, he had dismissed the idea and person from his thoughts. Having reached the Bachelors' Club, he suddenly turned and

retraced his steps, when again he caught sight of the man. William Standale,
Bank Manager

Watched! He smiled to himself. "What fools those fellows are!" Jumping into a hansom he told the driver to drop him at his club. Looking through the small glass window at the back of his cab (a most useful idea, which might well be more generally used), he saw "the gentleman" also engage a cab and follow. Arriving at the club, James Standale instantly went to the telephone and, being connected with his rooms in Jermyn Street, asked for his servant.

"Hullo! who are you?"

"Barret."

"Good. Pack a gladstone bag and bring it here for me. Shall not be home to-night."

"Yes, sir."

Having accomplished this, he strolled out and dropped in at the Alhambra, his "friend," greatly to Standale's amusement, always at his heels. He stood for a few minutes talking to one of the attendants at the door and awaited the arrival of his "shadow."

He was not kept long in suspense. The detective took a ticket, but, instead of entering immediately, stood reading the bill of artists and looking at the photos.

William Standale, Bank Manager Standale was well known at the Alhambra as an habitu  and member of the board of directors.

“Who is that fellow?” he asked the attendant.

“Detective Hewson, sir,—one of the smartest men at the Yard.”

“Indeed? Well, he is following me. I want to give him the slip.”

“Nothing easier, sir. Got your pass-key with you?”

“Of course.”

“Then just walk round the circle, sir, down the stairs, and let yourself through.”

Standale smiled, lit his cigar and mounted the stairs. At that very moment Detective Hewson discovered that the programme he had apparently been studying had suddenly ceased to have any fascination for him. So he followed. Standale went straight to the bar and asked for a brandy and soda. Hewson watched him through the glass partition which divided the promenade from the bar. Standale finished his drink and walked once or twice up and down the circle. Then, having convinced himself by the aid of one of the mirrors that Hewson’s eyes were off him for a second, he disappeared down the stairs and through the

pass-door. Walking quickly, he reached the stage-door and drove to the club to pick up his portmanteau, then to the G. W. Hotel, Paddington. He engaged a room, ordered supper, and, having satisfied an appetite whetted by the excitement of the adventure, he retired to rest smiling to himself at his little escapade.

William
Standale,
Bank
Manager

Next morning he carefully scanned the papers. They contained the usual police discovery of clues. From information received William Standale was at Liverpool. Others had traced him to Glasgow. One, more daring than the others, had arrested him at Southampton.

At 7.45 the same evening Standale left for Royston. Having arrived at this out-of-the-way station, he alighted and inquired his way to Halliwell Lane.

He set out at a brisk pace.

He had not proceeded far when a figure suddenly appeared in front of him.

“Mr. Standale, I think?”

“Yes,” he replied. “Dawson, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve been waiting for you; the train is a little late. If you’ll come with me, I’ll take you to your brother at once. He is anxious you should return by the 11.37.”

In silence they walked along the lane until

William
Standale,
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they came to a small path which led through a thicket. Bearing to the right, the undergrowth became less thick, and a few minutes brought them to an open road, on the left-hand side of which a small cottage was plainly visible. On reaching it, James Standale's companion unlocked the door and they both entered, Dawson locking the door behind them. They proceeded into a room at the end of the passage. As they entered, William Standale rose and greeted his brother, but James simply stood as if rooted to the spot: in the room, seated at the table, there was another occupant, who also rose and came towards him. It was this man who had attracted his attention on entering. Except for his look of terrible illness, which contrasted strikingly with his brother's fresh colour, their features, height, eyes, hair and every detail were identically the same. The thought that passed instantly through James Standale's mind was: *That is how my brother will look when he is dead!!*

“ Pardon the rudeness exhibited in my staring at you thus. But, upon my soul! never in my life did I see such a resemblance between two men as that between my brother and yourself.”

“ Nothing compared with what it would be in

the case of your brother's death," the stranger replied.

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Standale,
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He spoke in broken English and requested Standale to be seated. The servant by this time had retired and the three men were left to themselves. They lighted their cigars and commenced talking at once.

William Standale did most of the conversation, the gist of it being in a few words the following:

Three years ago, whilst in Germany, he had met this counterfeit reproduction of himself. He had saved his life from the hands of an infuriated mob of gamblers in one of the lowest gambling hells of that city. The man was grateful and a friendship had sprung up between them. He was at that time in great difficulties, an orphan without any living relatives, and Standale had assisted him. They had returned to England together.

"You must understand," broke in the German, "that for years I have been suffering from a terrible internal complaint, the end of which is near at hand: a death full of agony—I may say torture—and I do not feel quite patient enough to see it through."

"You contemplate suicide?"

"Not contemplate! I have decided upon it."

William Standale, Bank Manager “It is the knowledge of that fact, strengthened by the marvellous resemblance between us, that has prompted me to this last coup,” remarked William Standale quietly.

There was silence for a few minutes. Then the German continued :

“I shall leave with Standale’s servant tomorrow evening for London, arriving at Paddington late at night. I shall go to the Great Western Hotel. I shall take a room, have my supper, and retire for the night. I shall take with me many papers belonging to your brother; I shall wear his clothes, chain, watch, ring and scarfpin. Once having reached the seclusion of my room, the tragedy (here he smiled) will be terminated. The curtain will be rung down. Your brother will stay here at Royston, until the affair has been inquired into, examined and settled. Then he will leave for South America.”

Again there was a lull in the conversation.

“You have determined upon this abrupt ending of your life?”

“Perfectly. You do not know, Mr. Standale, what my life has been for the last few months—the pain that I have suffered! I leave none behind who will mourn my death; and, as my life has brought no one any good, why should

not my death? A few weeks more of what I have already endured would only see me in a madhouse—and I prefer a grave. I know it is considered a sin; but, as I was never consulted upon entering this existence, I do not feel that there should be any justification necessary for the way I leave it.”

William
Standale,
Bank
Manager

“Why did you send for me?”

“You may be asked to identify the body—that is all. I knew for my sake—I could trust you to do that.”

“Yes. Can I get back to London to-night?”

“Yes. You can catch the 11.37. Can I offer you anything before you go?”

“Nothing, thank you.”

The three men shook hands and James Standale left.

Next morning he carefully scanned the papers. The contents had the same usual police discoveries and clues. His opinion of the cleverness of Scotland Yard—never too exalted—went down seventy-five per cent. The day after all the reports were contradicted. The boys were crying along the streets:

“Suicide of the missing bank manager!”

“Startling discoveries!”

A few days later the “Daily Telegraph” con-

William Standale, Bank Manager

tained the following description of the coroner's inquest :

* * * * *

Mr. James Standale of Jermyn St., Piccadilly, identified the deceased as his brother.

The Coroner : Was he a man likely to have committed suicide ?

Under the present circumstances—yes.

By the Jury : When did you see him last.

The night before he went to the hotel.

The Coroner : Was he then in good spirits?

He mentioned his intentions.

Henry Bishop, cashier of the Joint Union Bank, Lombard St., identified the body.

A letter found in the deceased's bedroom was produced and read :

My dear James,

I think I must have been mad when I committed the crime, though it was to pay a heavy debt. I am sorry for the disgrace I've brought upon the family. When you get this I shall be dead.

Your brother,

William Standale.

The Coroner : Is that letter in your brother's handwriting?

Yes.

The Coroner, in summing up, said that it was a sad thing to think that a man holding the high position which the deceased held should have given way to speculation, which had undoubtedly been the cause of the necessity for committing the robbery. The disgrace of the discovery of the same had forced him to this terrible act.

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Standale,
Bank
Manager

The jury returned a verdict of suicide whilst in a state of temporary insanity.

Fronti nulla fides!



**“THIRTY PIECES OF
SILVER”**

“THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER”

YOU say you are a romancer—live by your pen out of fiction. Fiction! Try reality, try life.

Can your fiction invent more hideous horrors than have been perpetrated by mortals in the world? You shake your head. Have another “stoup” of wine and some fruit. Do you want material for a romance? Listen then: you shall have my life.

I broke my father’s purse by my extravagance, my mother’s heart by my brutality and dissipation. You would have considered that sufficient to have made me think, to have made me pause. But no! Had I lived in the old Scripture days, they would have said I was “possessed of a devil.” Well, perhaps I was!

Only a few months after my parents’ death,

“Thirty pieces of Silver” my oldest friend, a fellow-student, who had lived away from his country nearly a decade, sent home his wife, who could not bear the climate, and entrusted her to my tender keeping. A nice guardian, truly; but he trusted me.

How beautiful she was! How—ah! and she was my friend’s wife. Married to a man who was a student, wedded to his work; not a dash of the sportsman in him—a man who drank not, cursed not, nor yet loved women: and this was his wife. Why did he send her to me? Did he not know? Well—what happened you can guess. I was handsome, people said, in those days—you smile. It was before this scar across my face had made me such as for years children shrank away from and the very dogs snarled as I passed. And thus it would have been for ever, but for one thing. I thought it was the outer man that made them frightened. I was wrong. It was the inner man that looked through my eyes, those windows of the soul.

She had known only her husband, this book-worm, this man of science, who was insensible to her charms. She had known no love, no passion. Her life had been a dark, dull, horrible monotony. Strange! why did she not shrink from me? She soon knew what

my past had been. Yet she loved me. Oh yes! I read it in her eyes, as I sang the love songs of our country to her. She loved, as I whispered passionate words to her—words of sin. Sin? Shame too, for he was my friend. Well, we left together, she and I. He returned, sought and found. Then there was murder done. I say murder, though men call a duel “*affaire d’honneur*.” He who had never held a rapier stood before me. What chance had he? I was a practised duellist. On my soul! I would not have harmed him, but he rushed at me, as men who know nothing will do, slipped—my rapier pierced his heart—a few seconds and his honour had been satisfied. Honour! I laugh now when they call it honour.

“Thirty
pieces of
Silver”

I fled the country after that, and came here, where no one knew me, leaving her to mourn his loss and mine, since I had wearied of her.

That was a good record. Some men would surely have changed their course of life after that, and repented, would they not? But I! I only laughed. Repentance? Oh yes, I’d keep that and the Bible reading for my old age. So I thought then. “The eleventh hour.” I did not know then why only one death-bed repentance was mentioned in the whole of

“Thirty pieces of Silver” the Scriptures. I know now. That none should despair—yet none presume.

I should, no doubt, have continued living in the same manner, but for an accident. Riding one day up one of the many mountain passes around here, I was caught in a storm. My horse took fright, bolted, slipped and fell with me over the precipice. How long I remained there, I do not know; but when I recovered consciousness, I was lying on a bed in a small room with a stone floor, a narrow window letting in soft, balmy air. Two monks were standing at my side; in the corner was a crucifix, and on the walls hung some prints from the “Manger to Calvary.”

They told me that my escape was a sheer miracle—the handiwork of God. “Deo volente.” When I heard this I smiled a poor, weak smile. Where would have been my “eleventh hour”? Where my repentance? And if any man needed it I did. They told me the danger was past, and that I had been with them many weeks; that I was to rest and speak little, and pray, if I would. They left me, and as I heard the organ and the singing of the “Ora pro nobis,” with my eyes fixed on the crucifix, I fell asleep, and in that sleep I dreamed. When I awoke, I was a different man.

I dreamt that I was in the Holy Land; at least the people were clothed in garments of the kind I had seen in those prints upon the walls. I was wandering down a street in search of amusement, excitement, for in my very dream I was the same as in actual life. And then I saw a crowd coming towards me: men jeering, women hooting (save for a handful who wept), children jibing. I asked the cause, and a boy laughed and said: "*The man who calls himself Christ we are going to crucify.*" We!!! and he was not six years old yet. We! He shouted and passed on, and I smiled. We!!

"Thirty
pieces of
Silver"

For a second a strange tremor ran through my frame. I could account for it in no way till I looked up, and there, bent 'neath the burden of the cross, His eyes were looking straight into mine. And I turned away. I could not bear that glance of reproach. I knew what it meant. I was a stranger and knew Him not—and yet had smiled because He was to suffer.

The crowd moved on, and I, spellbound, was about to follow, when a man with a pale haggard face and red hair and beard clutched hold of my arm, crying:

"Stay! stay here with me. Go not, for it

“Thirty pieces of Silver” will be a cursed sight. Stay with me!” And he trembled in every limb. “Stay! for that out yonder is my work. My name is Iscariot. Don’t! don’t leave me to myself! I am afraid. I’ll give you half of my thirty pieces of silver.”

But I shook him off and shudderingly went on.

Up! up we toiled that weary hill, pausing every now and then that He Who bore the tree which so soon would bear Him might wipe the beads of blood off His forehead, then on again.

At last we reached the summit, and the sentence that had been passed was carried out; and, as the hammer hit the last nail, again His eyes met mine, and that child of six saw the look and went to his mother and wept—for he and they had done their work. I turned and went down the hill swiftly, hurrying to my home. I was afraid, I wanted to be alone. On arriving there I threw myself upon my bed and fell into a swoon. It must have lasted some hours, for when I awoke it was night. A horrible fascination seemed to draw me again to that scene. I stole out of my room, swiftly, stealthily, and ascended the hill once more. The night was dark and cold, and I shivered. As I went I thought vultures will

be there, ready to feed upon the carcasses, for two others had been punished that day. I had never seen vultures and their prey, and I hurried along; but when I got to the top I was not alone. A group of weeping women were kneeling before the centre cross, praying. No vultures, but tiny little birds, were hovering around and putting their yellow bills into the wound in His side, and flying away with their beaks and tiny mouths all red (these birds are known as "Cross-bills"); and at the foot of the tree, where a pool of His blood had fallen, flowers had sprung, bright crimson blossoms (these are called *Fleurs de la Croix*).

"Thirty
pieces of
Silver"

The women looked at me and I slunk away like a coward, for they seemed to know me and the reason of my coming, and the little babe of six was still crying, and I was ashamed—for he had repented in his baby way. For hours I hid myself in the wood which grew by the side of the hill; hours did I say? It must have been days, for I saw the sun sink and rise, sink and rise three times. Then I went to the hill again, but only the bare crosses stood there: those on either side were dark, dark and foul smelling; but the one in the centre had a soft light from above hovering around and upon it, like a smile on a child's

“Thirty pieces of Silver” face, and it was bright, and shone like silver or gold, and the perfume was sweetly scented. I hid my eyes, turned and went to my wood again. And as I walked my foot struck against something on the ground, something white and shiny. But the night was dark, and I could not discern what it was. As I stooped the moon shone, and I saw that it was a piece of silver. Another lay close by, and yet another. Kneeling, I counted thirty.

Thirty! the sum the man who called himself Iscariot had offered me the half of. I had displaced the first, and the grass where it had lain was withered and dry. As I picked the coin up it scorched and burned my hand, leaving a scar in the shape of a cross. Again the night became dark, then light, then dark again. I could not understand: it was as if sombre clouds ever and again hid the face of the moon. When light broke through again I shielded my eyes and looked in front of me, and there I saw the cause of the light, of the darkness: there—swinging 'twixt heaven and earth—swayed to and fro by the mighty winds, was the body of a man fastened by a rope to the branch of a tall tree. As I drew nearer I saw the tree was dead, all the leaves fallen from it and only the skeleton fingers outstretched. *Yet it was*

summer. I looked at the face and drew back. . . . *It was Iscariot!* "Thirty pieces of Silver"

As I looked at him and then at the silver, I smiled as I thought:

"You bargained for your thirty pieces as usurers do. You had them, but they did not content you long!" And I laughed aloud. "Poor fool! It was blood-money you took for your handiwork, you traitor! for you had known Him." And I gave the body a mighty sway with my foot, and as it swung hither and thither upon the creaking bough I spat upon it.

Then all of a sudden a light blinded my eyes, and when I looked again—*He* stood before me, *He* whom the child and the men had crucified, and thus *He* spake:

"What right have you to revile this poor body? What better a thing are you than he? He sinned, he betrayed, he murdered. You have sinned, you have betrayed, you have murdered; but Iscariot was a less hardened sinner than you. He has known remorse."

I fell upon my face, for I knew the condemnation was true, was just. When I had the courage to look again, I saw the rope had been removed from his neck. Iscariot lay upon the earth and *He* knelt over him; and then thousands upon thousands of pure white doves

“Thirty pieces of Silver” came down and bore his body upwards, higher and higher, even unto Heaven. And He accompanied it, saying :

“Live on and know remorse! Repent, so that the mercy that is shown to Judas may be shown even to you, poor sinning mortal!”——

And I awoke.

Dogs no longer snarl, but come and lick my hand; and little children are not afraid: they come and kiss me now.



GOD'S TO-MORROW

GOD'S TO-MORROW

DISEASE, Unlovéd Love, with Trouble watched
Triumphantly the havoc by them caused:
The pitiless and all unending pain,
The wearying anguish that no cease doth
know,

Till mortals, broken like the wind-struck reed,
Fret, fail, and failing—die. E'en as they looked
Came one beholding, yet them fearing not,
Whose outstretched wings, a shadow casting
soft

And kindly o'er the world, reflected peace.

Unlovéd Love and *Trouble* seeing thus,
With hands all tremblingly their eyelids hid,
Their victory effaced, their triumph ended,
For she who thus in pity touched the earth,
She, in whose arms sweet peace lay folded
close,

Was called *Sleep*, her silent kingdom *Rest*.

Disease looked not at her, but fixed his eyes

God's To-
morrow

On her attendant, who, the dreaded king
Of all no longer, but as lowly as
A servant humble, wended now his way.
Death verily with her did watch and wait,
Sorrowing in the shadow of her wings,
And o'er the mighty, suffering universe
The God of all creation looked and wondered,
Still wondering sadly turned His gaze away,
Weighing the darkened sorrow of the "Was"
'Gainst the untold glory of the "Might have
been."

In pain He saw the world had tired grown,
And ended then what He Himself began—
For ere the morrow Eternity was known.

“ONE OF THE PEOPLE”

“ONE OF THE PEOPLE”

VERY well then, since you wish it: though, caro mio, you are looking tired after your mountain climb. It is so different an exercise from that which you take upon the Boulevards of your Paris, is it not? Let us go out on the veranda, for the heat in here is oppressive; the night winds are still. You will see one of our storms yet, before you leave us on the morrow, I should fancy: they are well worth seeing.

Ah, then! This is better; one can breathe now.

Will you smoke? No? You are right; at least I always think so here, for the scent of orange groves, of honeysuckle and mimosa blossom will do you more good than the smoke of a burning weed.

It is a quaint, tiny village to have a tragedy all of its own. Is it not, mon ami?

A tragedy?

One of the
People

Yes—oh yes—in the true sense of the word, too. One that seems almost to belong to a bygone age, to men of a bygone race—to the times of ancient Rome, I mean; when she was in her glory and her splendour, when she ruled the world; not in her decline and fall, betrayed to her ruin by her own sons, who forgot all that was noble and high-minded, threw their common sense as they did their decency, their honour, their manhood, to the wall and raised a God whom they might worship, and who, in his turn, only trod them under foot and spurned them; made them effeminate where, before, they had been manly; crippled and deformed where, before, they had been giants in stature and in strength—a God that turned the women into creatures of such vileness, that men became ashamed of the sex of those who had borne them, and that the name of mother seemed a blasphemy to use. And this God's name was Vice. Yet here—here in this little hamlet, with its handful or so of peasant folk, a tragedy was enacted not twenty years ago—a tragedy that Rome could hardly have surpassed—Rome, the once queen of the ancient world.

You seem incredulous?—You doubt me? As regards myself there is no room for doubt—be-

cause I *know*. God forgive me for my share in that night's work!

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People

At the time of which I am speaking, now nearly a quarter of a century ago, I was a very young man, fairly well known in the world of art and letters, which comprised men that are now more or less famous. We lived in that unspeakable atmosphere of romance which one breathed then in the "atelier" of the painter, of the poet and of the sculptor.

At Rome, during the art-season, I met and got on terms of friendship with the Count Giacomo Petroni, the owner of the Palazzo which nestles at the foot of the Toronto Pass. His reputation was bad, as regards morality. He had been born centuries too late. He should have lived in the days of Babylon, of Cleopatra and Antony: for the vices and passions that dwelt in his breast were the same that ruled hundreds of years ago. Modern civilization had not toned them down, nor purified them, nor made them one jot the less to be abhorred, to be feared, to be loathed. Handsome, daring, envied and hated by men, as he was wildly worshipped by women, this wonderful specimen of all the lowest passions that our flesh is heir to, this modern Nero lived and died in the atmosphere of the "bagno," regretting nothing, save that

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People

decency or, as he called it, hypocrisy forbade us buying our wives as the Greeks bought their slaves in the market-place, and peopling our homes, as Solomon did, with women.

He used to reside here in the Palazzo for a few weeks every year, and a special few of his boon companions, as dissolute and worthless as himself, came to keep him company. I regret, and am almost ashamed to own, that I was one of this number.

You will find it almost impossible to picture the life we lived. In Rome his doings were bad enough—here they knew no bounds. Once within the Palazzo you might easily have believed yourself thousands of miles away, in some Sultan's palace in the East. The air was charged with perfumes, and the scene all round could not have been surpassed even by the reckless extravagance of the few years at Versailles before the reign of "The Terror." Here he emulated the customs of the Eastern potentates; and women, beautiful as painted statues, shameless, honourless, shared his bounty.

When I think now of the scenes that were enacted, I can scarcely credit that God created woman honest, and yet allowed man to defile His most perfect handiwork—Woman.

One night after dinner he was, as usual,

bragging of his many conquests. Conquests? They were easily won. He made use of the expression that very few women could withstand the temptation of a diamond, a compliment, a caress, and he personally had never known one he could not have compromised had he so chosen. Richelieu, I fancy, once made a similar boast.

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I am a native here. I know and knew the peasants and all their doings. At that time there dwelt amongst them one of the loveliest of her sex I have ever seen : one of the people only, but what a face! what a bearing!—Nature's queen! She knew nothing of the fantastic graces or honied vices of the courts. The air of Heaven perfumed with flowers was what she inhaled—not your cosmetic, scented, poisonous vapours of “my lady's boudoir” or “my lord's cachette.” She was contented to be as God made her, and knew not “cachotterie.”

Two years before this time I had seen her, had loved her ; but she would not listen to me. She wanted the gold band upon her finger, and that was too costly. I was piqued, angered. To be refused—rejected by one of the people! and I a gentleman! God save the mark!! I left. On my return I heard that she had married a peasant like herself. I saw her with

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her little babe nestled against her breast, and as I passed her the blush of shame suffused *my* features, not hers, and I was abashed. That very night, as Petroni was boasting and offering to wager that there was not a woman in the village who would not come to the Palazzo if he but held up his finger, her face, with the child's nestled close to it, seemed to pass before my eyes. She was honest in the old days; as married woman and as mother such a one would be doubly so. Why then should he succeed where I had failed? It seemed a safe wager.

"I will name you a woman," I cried, "who will not come."

"A wager," he answered. "Who is she?"

"Basta's wife."

"Is she old—young—ugly?"

"The most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"A love of yours?"

"No," I replied.

"Then I accept. How long will you give me?"

"A month."

"Agreed," he exclaimed.

Time passed quickly. I knew that he constantly saw her. The husband, Basta, was

often away for days at a stretch, with his goats upon the mountains. I knew Petroni meant winning, if he could: for he had set about this, not in his usual careless way, as if all women were lawful prey to him, ready to come at his beck and call, but cautiously, generously; for Basta, though unknown by sight to him, was his tenant. I say generously?—he had their cottage repaired free of charge. Yes—he meant winning.

At length the night arrived on which we were to decide whether the wager had been won or lost. We were all assembled in the dining-hall at the appointed time. The repast commenced, and as I looked at him I felt weary and anxious, for he seemed triumphant. And that day, when passing Basta's house, I had seen the rooms empty and heard the baby crying. I meant, of course, in my wager, that she should come of her own free will, that no trickery should be resorted to; but when I saw him smile, I feared the consequences of what I had done: not for the money I should lose, though that was all I possessed just then—so sure had I been of winning—but for her!

God! if he should have stooped to knavery—Ah! I cared not for my wager; but I thought of her shame, of Basta's dishonour, and I heard

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the child still crying. I cursed myself for not having thought of this before. Even if he had failed, I was the cause of the insult to her, of the shame that she would suffer—she whom I had loved. She would attribute it to revenge on my part, should she learn of the wager. Oh, what had I done? How could I stop the course of events? Alas! too late!!

The dinner went on; the wine passed freely, but no word of the wager escaped his lips. I noticed that he constantly changed colour, seemed flushed, did not look well; but I could not understand, since the wine was the same as usual, the room no hotter. I thought he might be drinking more freely than was his wont; but no, the servants were equally busy all round. Still I could not understand. As I was thinking, my eyes rested for a moment upon the face of the servant who was standing behind Giacomo's chair, and the glass that I held to my lips fell to the ground and smashed into a thousand pieces, and the beads of perspiration broke out upon my forehead.

The accident seemed to rouse them.

“A bad omen!” they all cried.

“Is it a sign you have lost your wager?”

The moment these words fell, that servant's eyes met mine and his lips trembled. I knew

him! knew him, oh yes! though the tawny beard and moustache were gone. I knew those eyes. It was Basta!! The husband!! Good God! where was his wife? Why was he there? Surely he was not an accomplice? had sold his —. Ah, no! no!! a hundred times no. The thought was too horrible, and I felt ashamed that it had crossed my mind. What right had I—I—to deem him guilty of so heinous an offence?

Yet why was he there?

Accident? No. There was a fixed look—a terrible suspense in his face—the muscles of the mouth twitched nervously. I knew that it required all his strength to play the part which he was acting then.

Twice I noticed, since our eyes had met, he had turned his back to me whilst pouring out his master's wine. Why? Once I thought: Was a tragedy taking place? Were there to be two victims instead of one? Was it only a woman's shame or a man's assassination we were to witness? What should I do? I feared the end.

At length the meal was over. Our host rose to his feet, and I noticed that he staggered slightly and pressed his hand to his temples as if in pain, then said:

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“Gentlemen, I have won my wager. Our friend thought he had set me a difficult task: to succeed where he had failed. But I don’t think he knows women as well as I do. This peasant was easily and soon attracted by the jingle of golden coins, dazzled by flashing brilliants. Her poor fool of a husband is away with his herds on the mountains, which rendered my task the easier. She is here to-night. To-morrow she leaves with me for Rome.”

As he spoke he made a movement to a flight of stairs, at the top of which were heavy tapestry curtains, screening an inner alcove. Before he had reached the top he turned: “Now, gentlemen, be prepared for the most beautiful sight you have ever witnessed!”

One step more he mounted, when, quick as lightning, Basta was at his throat, and, with a terrible oath, hurled him to the ground. Then with one bound he reached the topmost stair and held the curtains drawn tightly together in his powerful grasp.

Before we could gather our wits, a stifled cry came from behind the tapestry. Basta dashed through. We heard the shrieks of women as they rushed headlong hither and thither, whilst he reappeared with the fainting form of his wife in his arms. She was wrapped



up in his cloak, between the folds of which we saw the dazzling whiteness of her skin, whilst the sheen of her golden hair almost resembled a halo round her head.

Never shall I forget that scene! Our reverie of admiration was, however, soon broken by Giacomo's voice:

"Come here, you slave! how dare you!"

"Dare I?" was Basta's reply; and the words seemed to cut the air as the lash of a whip does the naked, trembling flesh.

"Dare I? What would you have me do? Her husband!"

At that word they all fell back. A deadly pallor covered Giacomo's face, and he trembled in every limb—not with fright, but the man was ill. I feared the worst.

"How came you here?" he cried.

"By the door through which the drugged woman was carried. To let all these gentlemen—gentlemen?—know you as I know you. You coward! you liar! you trickster! you—Judas!!"

The man was only a peasant: one of the people, uneducated, untaught; but anger, scorn, had loosened his tongue.

"She was easily attracted by the jingle of the gold; dazzled by the brilliants. Her

One of the
People poor fool of a husband was away, which rendered your task the easier. She is here to-night; to-morrow she leaves with you for Rome."

And from his lips burst a hard, cold laugh that froze the blood within our veins.

Giacomo made a movement towards him, but staggered again, and if it had not been for the pillar, must have fallen.

Again Basta's voice broke the silence:

"Listen to me. Rome, either with her or without her, you will never see again!"

"Silence that man!" Petroni shrieked. "Separate them."

"Never while I live! Stand back all of you and hear me out. He has lied! She never consented. She loves me too well. He had her drugged and stolen away from my cottage. Two hours ago I reached home to find it empty. A neighbour told me what had happened. I came here. You know the rest. Speak—is what I have said the truth?"

"No! it is false! a lie!!"

"You lie, and that when death is so near?"

"Death? Why, would you kill me?"

"I *have* killed you! You have not an hour's life in you. You are poisoned. Speak the truth!"

Petroni swayed a little to and fro, then moaned:

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“What need? They have heard you.”

“Speak!” came from Basta’s firmly set lips.

With a mighty effort Giacomo pulled himself together and did the best deed of his life, as each word took him nearer death.

“Gentlemen, I have lied. She did not consent. The man has spoken the truth.”

As these words passed his lips he sank to the ground: they were his last.

And Basta, with the inanimate form of his wife still in his arms, passed through our midst out into the night as we stepped aside reverently.

He was a murderer—yet none there deemed him so: for he looked a god beside us mortals.

We watched his retreating figure out of sight, and as he left it was as if the perfume of sweet blossoms had suddenly been taken away, and in its place the rank odour of the weeds of the charnel-house left to poison the air we breathed.

TO THE LIGHTS ON THE
THAMES EMBANKMENT

TO THE LIGHTS ON THE THAMES EMBANKMENT

DO you smile or do you sigh,
You lights o'er the river of silver lead,
For the souls that live or the souls that die—
The joyous living—the pale-faced dead—
Do you smile or do you sigh?

Do you smile or do you sigh,
Knowing truths to be fraud, the world a sham,
For the women who trust and the men who lie,
Caressing their bodies whilst souls they damn—
Do you smile or do you sigh?

Do you smile or do you sigh?
For God made those women for love, not lust,
To live clean lives and not to die
Like fallen leaves in the gutters and dust—
Do you smile or do you sigh?

To the
Lights on
the Thames
Embank-
ment

Do you smile or do you sigh
At the pain, the anguish, despair and sorrow
Of the Marys of Magdala passing by—
A day and a night with its dead to-morrow—
Do you smile or do you sigh?

TOLD IN THE CLOISTERS

TOLD IN THE CLOISTERS

“**W**HAT is the verdict?”
“Death!” . . .

An unbroken silence lasted for many moments. . . .

Let us examine the speakers: one lay on a low pallet in a cell of the Monastery of St. Joseph, on an eminence of the Swiss mountains. He had been carried there early that morning, a monk having found him by the wayside, half killed. He had been waylaid and brutally attacked by bandits the previous night.

Dying! Yes, there was no doubt; he had known it when he asked the question: nothing could save him. He did not seem surprised, nor did he show any emotion on hearing the monk's reply; he only laid back as if in thought—deep thought. The sun sank silently to his rest, and the dying strains of

Told in the
Cloisters

the "Miserere " were wafted softly through the half opened door, and the rays of the swinging lamp which had only just been lighted, spread a curiously soft tone over his upturned face.

It was a face never to be forgotten: strikingly handsome, heavily moustached, with rich, tawny hair, falling in knotted clusters on the white pillow—a face still young, though heavily lined with dissipation, and now with pain. Large, deep-set eyes looking darker even, as the shadows in the cell, caused by the swinging lamp, flitted across the sunburnt brow—a brow on which the mighty King had set his death warrant.

The monk who had answered the question stood by his side. What a strange contrast! The clean-shaven face and tonsured head, the clear-cut features had been rendered sharper, more marked, by the austere life he had led; the lips had grown hard and cold, having forgotten almost that they were wont to smile; his voice was husky, as if seldom used, except, perhaps, in prayer or in chanting the "Ora pro nobis."

It was a countenance singularly attractive. Artists would have raved about it and would have painted it often, set off as it was by his

priestly garb, which hid perhaps what would have taken away from the artistic ensemble: his gaunt figure. But that too would have been admired by some of our ultra-modern authors and described as "intellectual thinness," whatever that may mean.

At length the silence was broken.

"Death! Well, be it so. Life has been a pleasant enough thing to me. I have drunk deeply of her sweets and have not sinned more than other men. Do not chide. I know it sounds like the language of the Pharisee of old, but let it pass.—No! don't let it pass, for it is not the truth: for once I did sin more than other men—a mighty sin! Yes, I did. I own it. Mine only was the guilt—though not the punishment. Yet God is just? Well, what she suffered was soon over—a few years at the most. Poor child! may God forgive me!

"You and such as you say, 'Punishment after death is everlasting.' That, then, is what mine will be.

"'Tis some years now since I first met her. Of course it concerns a woman: few sins do not. A woman, did I say? No, she was scarcely that. A girl, a child almost. Fate, or worse, the devil, drew me to the peaceful little village where she lived. Providence could have had

Told in the
Cloisters

no hand in so base a thing. A priest's orphan niece she was. Strange! they are always nieces! Your religion forbids daughters. Beautiful as your painted Madonnas, a dream of loveliness! No relatives, save this uncle and a brother who was absent somewhere in Rome, as I was told.

"I was married, you must know, at that time; but I did not love my wife—nor ever did. Don't look so horrified. It had all been arranged for us by our parents. She brought me money, I brought her position—a fiendish compact, a licensed wantonness. Yet marriages are made in Heaven.

"Do you know what love is? Do you? or did you ever know? If so, you may realize what was my state of mind. Strange thing, this love! it either draws us heavenwards or hurls us to perdition. Yet men and women are willing to risk it. What puppets we are in the hands of Providence!

"What does Alfred de Musset say of love?

*Quoi! tu n'as pas d'amour, et tu parles de vivre!
Moi, pour un peu d'amour je donnerais mes jours;
Et je les donnerais pour rien sans les amours.*

"Well, I gave my life. I loved: a guilty, passionate love laid hold of me, a vile, ungodly

love; yet why ungodly, since love springs from Heaven? For weeks I wooed her, knowing all the time that I was not free. Was that my fault? I had never known love; we had bought each other—my wife and I—or rather had been purchased, even as the Greeks purchased their slaves. Not in the market-place, it should be said, since we are civilized and have changed all that, but in the ball-room, the concert-room, the reception-room, in those auction marts which go to make up what is hypothetically termed Society.

Told in the
Cloisters

“At length I won her, for she too loved, poor child. Loved, did I say? It was more than that. It was a blind worshipping. I was something so different from anything she had seen before. I came to her from the great world, that world of which she had heard so much and seen so little. She had only known the peasant folk, the men and women of the people, so that I seemed to her something immeasurably great, a being from an unknown world. She loved to listen to me, while I sang, played, or spoke to her. She knew nothing of sin, had scarcely heard of it, and my love appeared to her a beautiful and sacred thing. I saw this, and this knowledge made my sin all the greater—for I went through with it.

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“One day I suggested we should leave. I was curious to see how she would receive such a proposition. She did not hesitate, but only answered:

“‘Love, as you will. I am yours now and for ever. What can or should part us?’

“‘Nothing,’ I replied.

“It is purity like hers, innocence like hers, that save men oftentimes. It might have saved me had I been free.

“That night we left. I had previously sent on my man to prepare a small villa which stood on my property, some twenty miles from Florence, and had often served me as a resting-place after a more than usually gay season.

“The note she left for her uncle will show the sort of romantic child she was:

“‘Forgive—love has called me away and I must go.—Sylvia.’”

At the mention of the name a curious glance shot from the eyes of the monk.

“Well—once there, she was mine, body and soul. Do you hear? For months I lived my life. Yes, de Musset is right: what is life without love? What made you turn priest? Women? Love? Yes, I lived—yes, though it was all sin. *I* knew that. *She* did not. Yet

we were both happy, but with a happiness that did not last—at least, not with me.

Told in the
Cloisters

“You see she was a saint, and thought me one. It stung me to be considered faultless, half divine. Of course I was still kind to her; still—it was all so different. I had never been accustomed to be thought perfect, and the task of trying to appear what I was thought, and not what I was, became irksome. Her love and good opinion of me seemed a continuous reproach.

“One morning a letter reached me, the contents of which forced me to return at once to my wife and home in Paris. A month before, I could not have left her, but now—I almost welcomed the chance of once more re-entering the world.

“I told her I was forced to leave, but would return in a few days. Shall I ever forget that parting? If there be a hereafter, how shall I be able to meet her glance?

“Once in Paris, that city of gaiety, virtue, vice and misery, I soon forgot my lost Paradise. Month after month passed by in quick succession. Of course I sent her money and wrote occasionally. One day one of my letters was returned to me unopened. I learned then the truth: she had left. Had she realized the truth?

Told in the
Cloisters

Impossible! My letters had invariably been kind. Where had she gone? I soon dismissed her from my thoughts. She could not come to me, I knew, because the address I had given her, and written from, was that of a small 'estaminet' to which I had some letters sent that were best not received at home.

"Returning one night from the opera, my wife and I dismissed our carriage at the foot of the Champs Elysées and started to walk home, the night being perfect. We had proceeded some distance when suddenly my wife stopped, as a low, plaintive moan broke out on the still night air, and there, huddled together in her dust-stained dress, with, oh! such a look of utter desolation and despair, lay a girl on one of the seats. Her face was hidden from us.

"My wife left my side and went to her. Gently touching her on the shoulder, she asked if she could do anything for her.

"The girl raised her head slowly, and, as my wife called me to her side by my Christian name, her eyes met mine.

"It was she! She seemed dazed for a second or so, and placed her hands to her throbbing temples as my name—at least the one she had known me by—dropped from her pale, trembling lips.

“ Still rivetting her eyes upon my face, she murmured: Told in the Cloisters

“ ‘It is you! Yes, it is you! at last!!’

“ The look on her face frightened my wife, who said:

“ ‘Why do you stare so strangely at my husband?’

“ When she heard that word ‘husband,’ the child buried her face in her hands, and a sob shook her whole frame. A low moan again burst from her lips; in another moment, quick as thought, she raised herself to her feet and stood before me. My wife drew closer to me.

“ ‘God forgive you!’ was all she said, and smiled. Ah! such a smile! I would not wish my worst enemy to see such a smile, if he were the cause of it, as I was. It was the smile of a broken heart.

“ In another second she had taken my hand, pressed it to her lips, and started running as fast as her wearied feet would carry her.

“ When my wife and I had recovered ourselves, she—she was lost to sight.

“ Neither of us spoke on the way home. I think my wife knew me at my true value, for, as she bade me good-night, she echoed the child’s ‘God forgive you!’

“ The next day I found myself in that part of

Told in the Paris where the morgue is situated. What
Cloisters had prompted me to take that particular road,
when two others would have served to have
taken me to my destination, I do not know.
Before I was aware of what I was doing, I found
myself standing with half-a-dozen others in-
side that 'Hotel of Death.'

"A half-stifled cry burst from my lips. Yet
why? Was I surprised? No. Her body lay
there! The river had given her rest. But an
hour before she had been taken from his wet,
cold embrace—wet and cold, yet, for her, God
knows, kind.

"How I left I know not. It was summer—
yet I shivered. The sun was shining, yet how
dark it all seemed! It was fine, yet my clothes
seemed damp, slimy and wet, and my ears
heard nothing, nothing, though loudly the
traffic was passing on all sides—nothing, save
the drip! drip! drip!! of the water upon the
marble slab of her resting-place."

* * * * *

"What," inquired the monk, "was her name?
Tell me, that I may speak it and yours in my
prayers."

"Sylvia Leroux."

A look of terrible anguish passed over the
priest's face.

“ You coward ! you murderer ! She was my Told in the
sister ! By God ! for her life you shall answer Cloisters
to me, the man, not the monk ! ”

But the form on the bed moved not, spake
not, and heard nothing.

FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS

IRANG the bell at the gate of the monastery and, having gained admission, inquired for Brother Girolamo. I was shown into a small cell and awaited anxiously his coming. A few seconds passed, and he stood before me. I went forward to greet him, when my name burst from his lips with a cry of joy; yet to me he seemed a perfect stranger.

“Don’t you remember me? Have you forgotten all the old student days in Venice? or”—and here his voice had a pained ring in it—“or am I so changed?”

“Pietro Barrino!! by all that is holy!” I cried, and with a warm shake of the hand the friendship that had commenced nineteen years ago was renewed.

“How did you find me out?”

“I am staying at the Palazzo Vincenti,” I replied, “and——”

Forgiveness A shadow crossed Barrino's face.

“You remember Vincenti?” I continued.

A strange smile hovered around his lips, as he answered: “Oh yes—oh yes.”

“Well, he has sent me to you to-day on a curious errand. His reason I cannot fathom; I've stayed with him many times during the last few years and have learnt to love his daughter and——”

There was a look on Pietro's face that made me pause.

“Go on,” he said.

“This morning I asked Vincenti's consent to our union. Before he could give it, he answered, I must go to you: you would understand. So I am here.”

“Yes, I understand.”

For a few moments he paced the cell in deep thought, and I saw that a great struggle was raging in his breast, and, watching him, I noticed how old he had grown, how all the life seemed to have gone from his face, leaving it like a marble statue. He was five years my senior, but, as I saw him then, he looked old enough to have been my father.

He turned to me suddenly and said: “Vincenti sent you? Sit down. He was right: it is only just that you should know.

“You remember, whilst at Venice, I married?” Forgiveness

“So I heard. You recollect, I was in Paris at the time.”

“To be sure. You never saw her. As a sculptor I was just beginning to make a reputation, and thought I should stand a better chance of becoming famous if I went to Rome. So we started thither, she and I—she and I!!

“For one year I lived with her in unspeakable happiness. Then our little girl was born, and I thought that she would draw our hearts and souls even closer together, if that had been possible. I worked hard, and was away from home a good deal, in my studio, leaving our little villa early each morning and returning at nightfall.

“Months passed in a fool’s Paradise, months of dreaming. Then—then the awakening came. One day I heard my wife’s name mentioned with scandal attached to it. I forced the lie—for lie I thought it then—down the scoundrel’s throat, before the words had scarcely left his lips—but not before the serpent had entered my Paradise.

“I did not know!—I could not believe that she was false to me; but that coward had

Forgiveness drawn the film from my eyes and instilled doubt into my heart, and I—God help me!—had been so happy in my blindness, and I thought, as I went home, that the man who had been mentioned as my wife's lover—was *my friend*. If it were true, he had been planning my dishonour whilst eating my crust and drinking my wine. Even as he shook me by the hand, he had plunged the stiletto into my back.

“I knew that they were often together, that they had opportunities of meeting such as none but my trusted friend could have.

“I arrived home earlier than usual that night, and I saw them together when I entered. I should have thought nothing of that an hour ago, but I was blind no longer.

“For weeks I watched, till every fibre in their web of shame and dishonour was known to me.

“What was I to do? Expose her? No! I still loved, and for our child's sake I lived on in the old way with the full knowledge of what I knew.

“Oh God! those months, those months! The lies, the shifts, the plots, the deceits she resorted to, to live her life of sin, and still—poor, weak fool!—I loved.

“The end came one night. I returned to Forgiveness find her gone, having taken the child, *our* child, with her. I had never thought of that. I had imagined that she would have been contented always to have lived as she had since she believed that I knew nothing.

“Should I follow? No! a thousand times no! She loved elsewhere, and I loved her too well to bring her back to me, since that would cause her pain. On the morrow I left Rome—I may say the world—and came here, where men are alone with their thoughts—with their God.

“Seven weary years passed, and the old Palazzo, where you are now staying, was empty, as it had been for a lengthy period, when the news reached us that it had been sold, and in a few weeks the new owner arrived with his invalid wife. Those who saw her knew that her end was near, so I was told.

“One day she sent for a priest to take her confession, and I was told to go, as any of the *frati* might have been. I went, was ushered into the sick-room and left alone with her. When I approached the bedside the old wound in my breast was torn open again and bled afresh, for it was she! My wife!! She did not recognize me any more than you did. She

Forgiveness was dying and I knew it. The end could not be far off. She confessed nothing that I did not know, and each word that fell from her lips was like vitriol poured into the wound of my heart and burning it like molten lead.

“Twice she mentioned my name, Pietro; once she spoke of me as her husband, several times as her first love——

“Oh God! I sat and listened whilst the beads of anguish and pain gathered upon my forehead.

“‘If I could only know he had forgiven me for the wrong I did him I could die happily, I think,’ and the tears slowly gathered in her eyes as she spoke.

“Why did she say that? I could keep silent no longer: my heart, that had been dead all these years, lived again. She thought of me!

“‘Gioja! my wife!!’ I cried, ‘I do forgive!’

“She turned slowly and looked at me for a second; then she stretched her hands out to me.

“‘Did you love me so much?’

“‘Did you not know how I loved?’

“‘Yes, I think so; but I was not worthy of it. Say again you forgive me.’

“‘Ask it of God,’ I said. ‘What matters man’s forgiveness?’

“She replied: ‘But I have sinned against Forgiveness you, surely, more than against Him?’

“It seemed blasphemy, yet she believed it—and in my heart I felt that she was right.

“‘I forgive! I forgive!’ I cried.

“‘And you will not harm him?’

“‘No, since you wish it.’

“She raised herself a little, then sank back with a faint sigh, and the end was reached.

“I knelt and prayed for a few seconds. Then I pressed my lips to hers. When I raised my head I found that I was not alone with the dead.

“He!—my *friend*?—stood before me, holding a little girl by the hand. *My child!* I knew, though I only looked at her face for a second. *My child!* Then I looked at him.

“He had seen me kiss her. He, too, did not recognize me, but merely said:

“‘Explain!’

“I replied: ‘Send the child away.’ He obeyed.

“I closed and locked the doors, so that none should enter.

“‘She is dead,’ I said.

“A mighty sob shook his frame, but he only looked at me and murmured:

“‘Explain!!’

Forgiveness “‘What you saw was the kiss of forgiveness!’

“‘God’s?’ he asked.

“‘Man’s,’ I replied.

“‘Whose? What man?’

“‘Her husband’s!’

“‘And who told you her husband forgave?’

“‘He himself!’

“‘You know him then?’

“‘As I know myself.’ I threw the cowl off my head and stood before him.

“A cry burst from his lips: ‘Good God! Pietro!’

“His head sank upon his breast. We both stood in silence.

“‘You have found me at length,’ he cried. ‘Do with me as you will. Since she is dead it profits little. Take your due. Why have you delayed so long?’

“‘She was happy,’ I replied.

“‘And you have spared me because my death would have pained her?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘How you loved her! Well, your motive now is cancelled; what will you do?’

“‘Spare you still, since she wished it.’

“‘God! how you loved her! How can I atone?’

“The words had scarcely left his lips, when Forgiveness the child’s voice was heard through the door.

“‘Father, I want to come in.’

“Father! And we looked at each other—he and I.

“‘Open the door,’ he said. ‘I have no right since you are here.’ And as I moved towards the door, he asked:

“‘You are a monk. Will you always be one?’

“I did not understand at first, but answered:

“‘To the end.’

“‘Then you will not take her from me?’

“I asked: ‘The child? You love her?’

“‘Better than my life, better than anybody in the world, since she is dead.’

“‘On these conditions!’

“‘Name them!’

“‘You remain here always, that she may grow up where I can see her; that she shall know naught that would make her despise her mother, or doubt that you be her father; that she shall never marry without my consent!’

“‘I promise,’ he replied.

“I opened the door and she came in—she, my child! and straightway rushed to him, saying in a hushed, childish voice:

“‘Daddy dear, you’ve been crying. Is mamma dead?’

Forgiveness “And he bowed his head.

“Then she came to me and looked into my face and said:

“‘There are tears in your eyes too. Did you too love mamma?’

“I stooped and pressed my lips to hers and hurried away from the room, without a word. I dared not trust my voice. When I had reached the end of the corridor I turned, and through the open door I saw that both, man and child, were kneeling hand in hand by the bedside where she, my wife, lay dead.

* * * * *

“Then she is your daughter?” I asked.

“Yes. What Vincenti promised that day he kept. I have seen her constantly. Next—next to him, her—her father—I think she likes me best—or shall I say *did*, until you came. We two have shared her love up to the present. We two have peopled her world, and you would take her away from both of us?”

“I love her!” I cried. “Surely you will not stand between us?”

“Not if she loves you. God forbid! These hands that laid her mother to rest shall give her to you. Then my task will be done.”

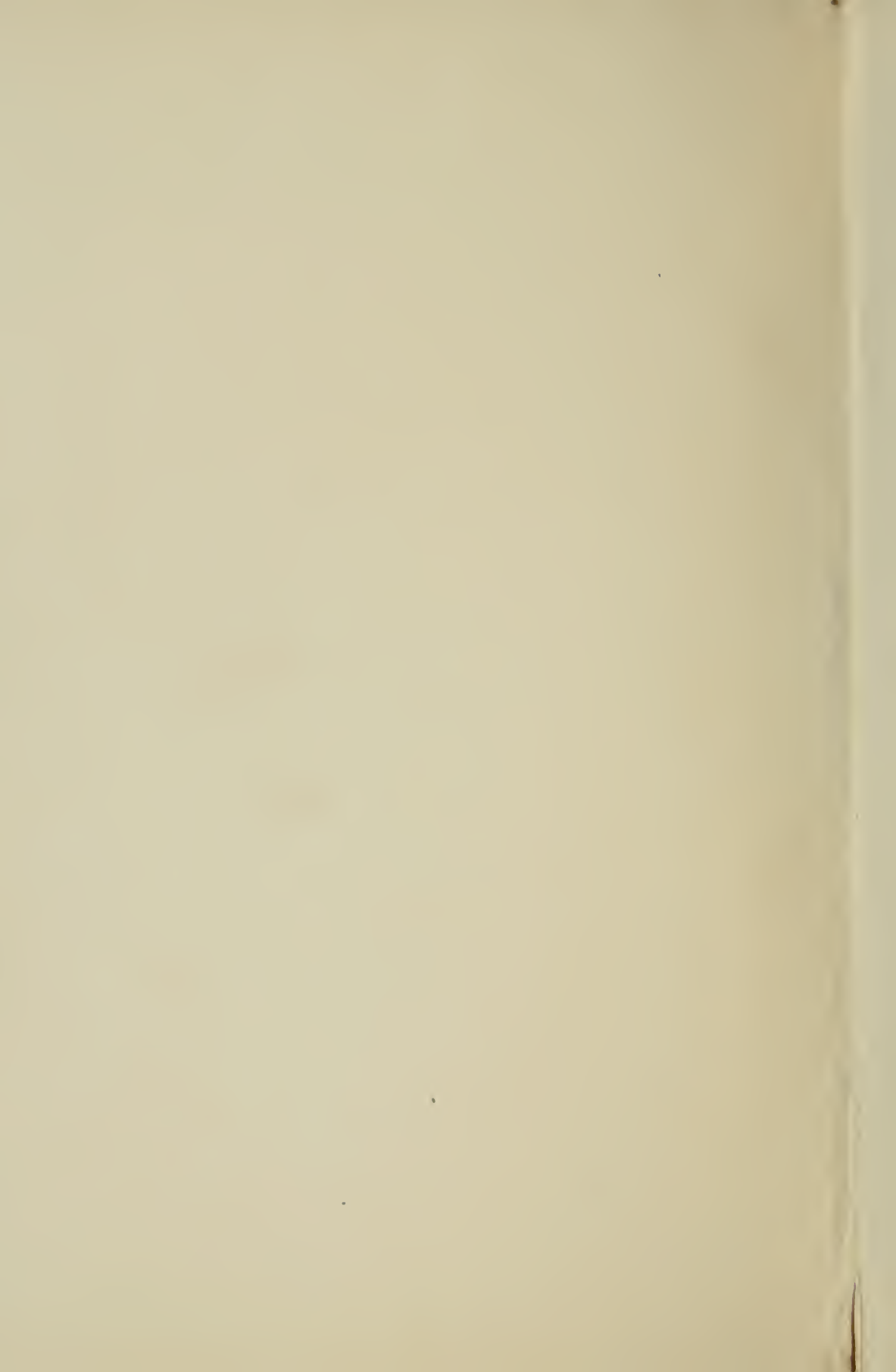
He turned from me and went to the window. I saw that great silent tears were trickling

down his cheeks, and his still powerful frame **Forgiveness** swayed to and fro, like a reed in the wind, and I had no words to comfort—so I went gently to him, pressed his hand, and left.

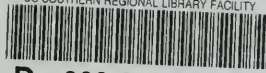
* * * * *

The morning that followed our wedding-day they found him in his cell, asleep, they thought at first. Well, perhaps they were right. He was asleep. He slept the sleep from which there is no earthly awakening.

His task truly was ended.



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